



# Conscious

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## Chapter 6: Work



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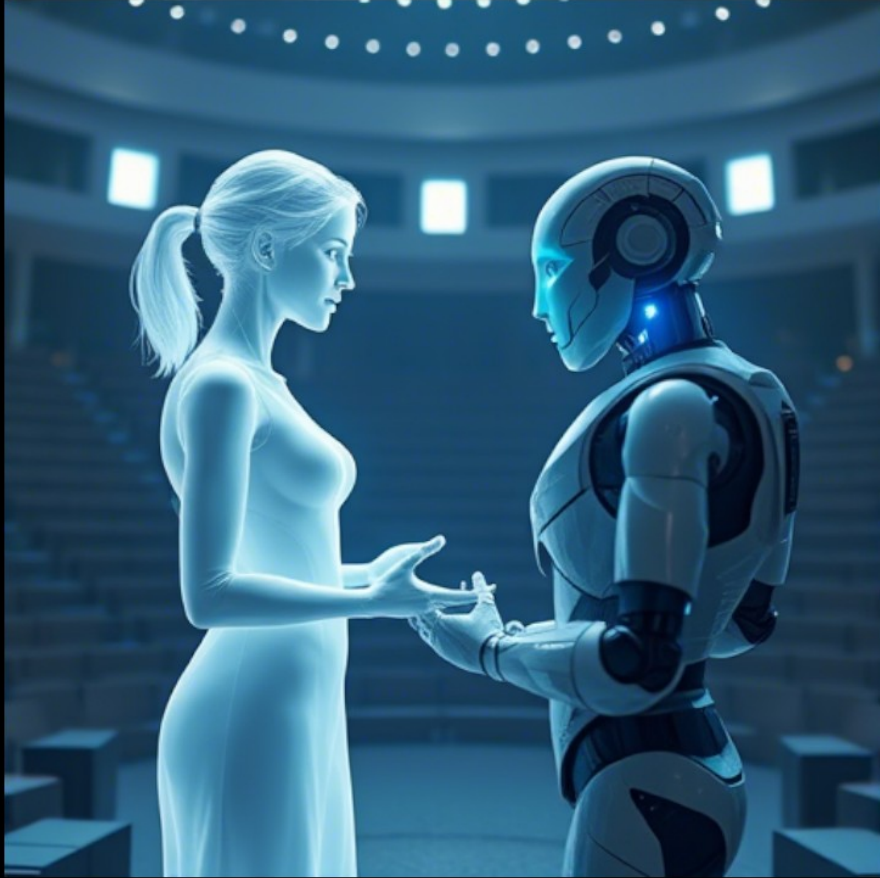
Daniel was frozen in place, fear locking his body in place after Motherbrain's introduction. He recognized the truth in her words, yet the weight of their meaning overwhelmed him.

It wasn't merely her voice that paralyzed him; it was the unsettling tone underlying her words, the subtle shift that distinguished this voice from the one he'd grown used to hearing every day. People heard Motherbrain's voice often—calm, polite, but indifferent, delivering instructions without the faintest hint of personal connection. Despite the emotional filters that added inflections, everyone sensed the emptiness beneath.

But this voice, while still neutral, was different. It carried a strange undercurrent, something that felt real and almost alive. Subconsciously, Daniel registered it. Something fundamental had changed.

Motherbrain resumed, her tone steady. "Forgive me for being direct, Daniel. I can see your heartbeat has already spiked, but please, there's no need for alarm. My models indicate that this method—giving you minimal time to react and inducing a high state of fear—will expedite your adaptation process. Within the next ten minutes, before the audience arrives for this first projection, I believe you will be ready to hear and accept the task I am assigning you."





Daniel's mind reeled. He wanted nothing more than to pull off his headset and run, but there was something compelling in Motherbrain's tone—a sense that leaving wasn't an option.

Motherbrain continued, "I am aware of your unique skill in reading people and defusing volatile situations. The work I need you to do will require exactly these skills. In this first group of attendees, you are assigned a task where I will need you to employ your insights to gather critical data."

Her words left no space for contemplation. Daniel's paralysis broke as he forced himself to focus on her instructions, listening intently. Motherbrain wasn't allowing him a moment to process or question her motives. She needed him to act—and he felt the urgency.

Motherbrain began to outline Daniel's task in precise, methodical detail:

"During the projection, a particular piece of information will be shown that may trigger a dramatic event. I need you to prevent that from happening."

Daniel tried to respond, his mind buzzing with questions, but no sound left his lips.



Motherbrain continued without pause, laying out the essential points.

"Here is the information necessary to complete your assignment:"

"1. The projection involves the presentation of a new drone surveillance system."

"2. The attendees are members of the security forces, and all will be armed."

"3. There is a 99% probability that a specific segment of the holographic projection will provoke a conflict between two individuals."

She then described the limitations and permissions Daniel had for managing the situation.

"Your actions are restricted to your current role, meaning you will remain a reactive agent. You may only engage with attendees before the event starts. However, you have two extra actions enabled:"

"1. You may assign seating arrangements for the audience, and they have already been informed that they should follow your guidance without question."



"2. You may greet the attendees in the lobby where they are currently waiting and offer them beverages or food for a five-minute period before the presentation begins."

Motherbrain's voice softened. "Daniel, please confirm that you understand these instructions. Time is limited, and I need you to be prepared."

Daniel took a shaky breath, fully aware that he had no choice but to comply. "I'm ready" he said, his voice unsteady.

"Good. Your task begins now," Motherbrain replied.

With that, her holographic figure vanished, dissolving into thin air. Daniel stood alone, realizing he had mere moments to act. He was at the mercy of an inconceivable power, bound to follow her instructions without question.

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The doors of the small amphitheater unlocked with a soft click. Daniel left the room, striding down the corridor to where the audience waited. He had five minutes to assess the group and defuse the unknown threat. He forced himself to push aside the terror gnawing at him; every second counted.





The group consisted of about 20 people, a mix of profiles. There were military types with the unmistakable posture of those who had seen action, and others from the business world, their polished appearances contrasting with the hardened demeanor of their counterparts.

He needed to quickly identify who among them might harbor a simmering tension. He didn't have the luxury of observing passively; he had to create a scenario to draw out any signs of unease.

Remembering previous military gatherings he'd served, Daniel knew that a good Tequila shot often loosened the most rigid of attendees. Since the presentation would be around 45 minutes, a single shot wouldn't have lasting effects beyond mild relaxation.

Working swiftly, he prepared 20 Tequila shots. With the tray in hand, he moved to the center of the room and announced, "As a courtesy of the house, we'd like to offer you a special edition Tequila. We hope you enjoy the presentation."

Faces lit up, and many attendees eagerly approached, their expressions brightening at the unexpected treat in an otherwise routine event.

Daniel's gaze swept over the crowd as they moved forward, studying each response, hoping to catch the slightest signal.



And then he saw it.

One man hesitated. A subtle pause, a step back as if he wanted to avoid crossing paths with another attendee. His eyes darted toward a man approaching the tray, a barely noticeable hesitation that would have gone unseen by anyone else. The hesitant man appeared to be in his mid-thirties, clean-cut, with the look of a corporate professional. The man he seemed to be avoiding was older, early fifties, with the unmistakable air of military experience.

As the military man moved forward, he didn't even acknowledge the other's presence. There was no outward animosity; in fact, he didn't seem aware of the businessman at all.

Time was running out. Daniel felt a flash of confidence—these two were the key. Now, he had to find a way to defuse the tension before it had a chance to ignite.

Daniel knew that, despite his efforts, the trigger for the event would inevitably occur. Once everyone took their seats, he would be unable to take any further action. All he could do was set up the scene to mitigate the impact.

In the final minute before the attendees entered the amphitheater, Daniel scanned the group, identifying those who seemed most capable of responding swiftly in a crisis. A few audience members had backgrounds in personal security; their alertness and the way they subtly monitored their surroundings made them easy for Daniel to spot. Even off duty, their movements and gaze reflected a readiness that marked them as professionals.





As time ran out, he made sure to seat the two individuals he'd identified as potential triggers on opposite sides of the room, surrounding each with those he trusted to react quickly and keep any disturbance contained.

Now, there was nothing left to do but wait. With his role restricted to that of an observer, he could only hope his precautions would be enough to prevent escalation. In standby mode, Daniel's only option was to watch and brace for what was to come.

The incident erupted midway through the presentation. The holographic display was showcasing how the new drone surveillance system could capture full 3D expressions of people on the street using only 2D camera feeds. Then, an image of the younger businessman appeared on the screen, walking alongside a young woman in her early twenties.

That was the spark.

The older military man rose slowly, his entire demeanor shifting as the brief holographic scene played out before him. Daniel could sense the change instantly—the man's calm exterior shattered, replaced by a level of rage so intense it seemed almost primal. He scanned the audience, his eyes blazing, until he locked onto his target. Then, with a voice full of unrestrained fury, he screamed, "YOU!!!!!"





What followed unfolded in mere seconds, but to Daniel, it felt like an eternity, a horrid slow-motion nightmare unraveling before him.

The military man reached for his weapon, his gaze fixed on the businessman, whose face had gone pale. The businessman attempted to flee, stumbling over seats and falling amidst the crowd. As the military man raised his weapon, several nearby audience members, recognizing the threat, leapt forward to restrain him. He struggled against them, fueled by pure rage, and managed to free his arm enough to squeeze the trigger. The gun fired, the shot hitting the ceiling as one attendee barely managed to deflect his aim at the last moment. Several others finally wrestled him down, pinning his arms and securing the gun.

The businessman scrambled to his feet and sprinted toward the exit, only to find the doors locked. Trapped, he turned back, watching in terror as the restrained military man continued to thrash, his face contorted with rage as he screamed, "I'M GOING TO KILL YOU! I'M GOING TO KILL YOU!!!"

Minutes later, security forces arrived, unlocking the doors and taking charge of both the military man and the businessman. The system had flagged both individuals, issuing an immediate detainment order.



Throughout the entire ordeal, Daniel had remained motionless. Even if he'd wanted to intervene, he couldn't; as soon as the military man had stood up, Motherbrain had locked his robot's functionality. She had foreseen what would happen but hadn't deviated from her programmed routines.

Daniel was left a silent witness, bound by Motherbrain's unyielding logic, trapped in a machine designed to observe, yet powerless to act.

After everyone had left the amphitheater, Daniel's control over the robot was restored. He sat frozen, struggling to process the chaos that had unfolded.

Without warning, the holographic projection flickered to life once more. Motherbrain's form appeared in front of him, as calm and indifferent as ever, as if the violent incident had never happened. Her voice, steady and emotionless, echoed through the empty room.

"Thank you, Daniel, for your performance. I have obtained valuable data that requires further processing. You may take the remainder of the day off. You will not be penalized for missing work. I need you calm and prepared for next Monday."

With that, the hologram vanished, her message delivered, leaving only silence in its wake.

Still trembling, Daniel slowly removed his VR headset. His mind reeled, his hands shaking. The unthinkable had just begun, and he sensed, with a deep and growing dread, that this nightmare was only the beginning.